

Measure will increase the outdated mileage reimbursement rate for disabled veterans; tie it to the rate that federal employees receive for their travel

Washington, DC - The U.S. House of Representatives today passed an amendment by 12th District Georgia Congressman John Barrow (D-Savannah) that will fully reimburse disabled veterans for the cost of their medical travel expense for the first time in 30 years.

The amendment, which was added to the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act of 2007 (H.R. 1538), provides that America's disabled veterans will be reimbursed for the cost of their travel to and from VA facilities reimbursed at the same rates that federal employees receive for their business travel. In addition, the amendment will repeal a \$6 round-trip deductible that applies to veterans who have to travel for their health care but not to civil servants.

The mileage reimbursement rate for federal employees is adjusted for inflation and goes up as the price of gas increases. That rate was just increased by 4¢ per mile on January 22 of this year. However, the last time the veterans' reimbursement rate was adjusted was in 1977, and it hasn't been increased since then.

"For the last 30 years, disabled veterans in this country have been shortchanged," Barrow said. "The mileage reimbursement rate for disabled vets hasn't changed since 1977, even though the law specifically says that VA has a responsibility to update it."

"When you ignore a benefit as much as this, and for as long as this, it's the equivalent of repeal by neglect," Barrow continued. "My amendment says, 'No more having to remember veterans when it comes time to raise the mileage rates, and no more forgetting veterans every time the mileage rate gets raised for everyone else.'"

Since most VA clinics in Georgia provide only primary care and mental health services, many of the state's disabled veterans are forced to travel hundreds of miles to either Atlanta or Augusta to receive specialty treatments for injury-related care. Under current federal law, eligible disabled veterans are reimbursed at only 11¢ per mile - less than one fourth of the 48.5¢ per mile reimbursement that federal employees presently receive for their travel.

Barrow introduced the *Disabled Veterans Fairness Act* in the both 109th Congress (H.R. 4025) and the 110th Congress (H.R.

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) to fix this problem.

All of the changes that Barrow called for in his legislation were incorporated into today's amendment.

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The Wounded Warrior Assistance Act of 2007 now goes to the Senate for its consideration. If the mileage reimbursement measure is incorporated in the final version of the bill, and then signed by the President, then the mileage reimbursement rate would be scheduled to increase within 90 days after the date of enactment.

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